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A BOOK OF POEMS

AL QUE QUIERE!

By William Carlos Williams

THE TEMPERS

[London: Elkin Mathews]

A BOOK OF POEMS

AL QUE QUIERE!

BY

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

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1917

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Había sido un arbusto desmedrado que prolonga sus filamentos hasta encontrar el humus necesario en una tierra neuva. Y cómo me nutría! Me nutría con la beatitud con que las hojas trémulas de clorófila se extienden al sol; con la beautitud con que una raíz encuentra un cadáver en descomposition; con la beatitud con que los convalecientes dan sus pasos vacilantes en las mañanas de primivera, bañadas de luz;...

RAFAEL ARÉVALO MARTÍNEZ

Many of the poems in this book have appeared in magazines, especially in *Poetry, Others, The Egoist,* and *The Poetry Journal.*

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AL QUE QUIERE!

SUB TERRA

Where shall I find you,
you my grotesque fellows
that I seek everywhere
to make up my band?
None, not one
with the earthy tastes I require;
the burrowing pride that rises
subtly as on a bush in May.

Where are you this day,
you my seven year locusts
with cased wings?
Ah my beauties how I long—!
That harvest
that shall be your advent—
thrusting up through the grass,
up under the weeds
answering me,
that shall be satisfying!
The light shall leap and snap
that day as with a million lashes!

Oh, I have you; yes
you are about me in a sense:
playing under the blue pools
that are my windows,—
but they shut you out still,
there in the half light.

For the simple truth is
that though I see you clear enough
you are not there!

It is not that—it is you,
you I want!

—God, if I could fathom
  the guts of shadows!

You to come with me
poking into negro houses
with their gloom and smell!
In among children
leaping around a dead dog!
Mimicking
onto the lawns of the rich!
You!
to go with me a-tip-toe,
head down under heaven,
nostrils lipping the wind!

PASTORAL

When I was younger
it was plain to me
I must make something of myself.
Older now
I walk back streets
admiring the houses

of the very poor:
roof out of line with sides
the yards cluttered
with old chicken wire, ashes,
furniture gone wrong;
the fences and outhouses
built of barrel-staves
and parts of boxes, all,
if I am fortunate,
smeared a bluish green
that properly weathered
pleases me best
of all colors.

No one
will believe this
of vast import to the nation.

CHICKORY AND DAISIES

I.

Lift your flowers
on bitter stems
chickory!
Lift them up
out of the scorched ground!
Bear no foliage
but give yourself
wholly to that!

Strain under them
you bitter stems
that no beast eats—
and scorn greyness!
Into the heat with them:
cool!
luxuriant! sky-blue!
The earth cracks and
is shriveled up;
the wind moans piteously;
the sky goes out
if you should fail.

II.

I saw a child with daisies
for weaving into the hair
tear the stems
with her teeth!

METRIC FIGURE

There is a bird in the poplars!
It is the sun!
The leaves are little yellow fish
swimming in the river.
The bird skims above them,
day is on his wings.
Phœbus!
It is he that is making

the great gleam among the poplars!
It is his singing
outshines the noise
of leaves clashing in the wind.

WOMAN WALKING

An oblique cloud of purple smoke
across a milky silhouette
of house sides and tiny trees—
a little village—
that ends in a saw edge
of mist-covered trees
on a sheet of grey sky.

To the right, jutting in,
a dark crimson corner of roof.
To the left, half a tree:

—what a blessing it is
to see you in the street again,
powerful woman,
coming with swinging haunches,
breasts straight forward,
supple shoulders, full arms
and strong, soft hands (I've felt them)
carrying the heavy basket.
I might well see you oftener!
And for a different reason

than the fresh eggs
you bring us so regularly.

Yes, you, young as I,
with boney brows,
kind grey eyes and a kind mouth;
you walking out toward me
from that dead hillside!
I might well see you oftener.

GULLS

My townspeople, beyond in the great
world,
are many with whom it were far more
profitable for me to live than here with
you.
These whirr about me calling, calling!
and for my own part I answer them,
loud as I can,
but they, being free, pass!
I remain! Therefore, listen!
For you will not soon have another
singer.

First I say this: you have seen
the strange birds, have you not, that
sometimes
rest upon our river in winter?

Let them cause you to think well then
of the storms
that drive many to shelter. These things
do not happen without reason.

And the next thing I say is this:
I saw an eagle once circling against the
clouds
over one of our principal churches—
Easter, it was—a beautiful day!—:
three gulls came from above the river
and crossed slowly seaward!
Oh, I know you have your own hymns, I
have heard them—
and because I knew they invoked some
great protector
I could not be angry with you, no matter
how much they outraged true music—

You see, it is not necessary for us to leap
at each other,
and, as I told you, in the end
the gulls moved seaward very quietly.

APPEAL

You who are so mighty,
crimson salamander,
hear me once more.

I lay among the half burned sticks
at the edge of the fire.
The fiend was creeping in.
I felt the cold tips of fingers—

O crimson salamander!

Give me one little flame,
one!
that I may bind it
protectingly about the wrist
of him that flung me here,
here upon the very center!

This is my song.

IN HARBOR

Surely there, among the great docks, is
peace, my mind;
there with the ships moored in the river.
Go out, timid child,
and snuggle in among the great ships
talking so quietly.
Maybe you will even fall asleep near
them and be
lifted into one of their laps, and in the
morning—
There is always the morning in which to
remember it all!

Of what are they gossiping? God knows.
And God knows it matters little for we
    cannot understand them.
Yet it is certainly of the sea, of that
    there can be no question.
It is a quiet sound. Rest! That's all
    I care for now.
The smell of them will put us to sleep
    presently.
Smell! It is the sea water mingling here
    into the river—
at least so it seems—perhaps it is some-
    thing else—but what matter?

The sea water! It is quiet and smooth
    here!
How slowly they move, little by little
    trying
the hawsers that drop and groan with
    their agony.
Yes, it is certainly of the high sea they
    are talking.

WINTER SUNSET

Then I raised my head
and stared out over
the blue February waste
to the blue bank of hill
with stars on it

in strings and festoons—
but above that:
one opaque
stone of a cloud
just on the hill
left and right
as far as I could see;
and above that
a red streak, then
icy blue sky!

It was a fearful thing
to come into a man's heart
at that time: that stone
over the little blinking stars
they'd set there.

APOLOGY

Why do I write today?

The beauty of
the terrible faces
of our nonentities
stirs me to it:

colored women
day workers—
old and experienced—
returning home at dusk

in cast off clothing
faces like
old Florentine oak.

Also

the set pieces
of your faces stir me—
leading citizens—
but not
in the same way.

PASTORAL

The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarreling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.
Meanwhile,
the old man who goes about

gathering dog-lime
walks in the gutter
without looking up
and his tread
is more majestic than
that of the Episcopal minister
approaching the pulpit
of a Sunday.
These things
astonish me beyond words.

LOVE SONG

Daisies are broken
petals are news of the day
stems lift to the grass tops
they catch on shoes
part in the middle
leave root and leaves secure.

Black branches
carry square leaves
to the wood's top.
They hold firm
break with a roar
show the white!

Your moods are slow
the shedding of leaves

and sure
the return in May!

We walked
in your father's grove
and saw the great oaks
lying with roots
ripped from the ground.

M. B.

Winter has spent this snow
out of envy, but spring is here!
He sits at the breakfast table
in his yellow hair
and disdains even the sun
walking outside
in spangled slippers:

He looks out: there is
a glare of lights
before a theater,—
a sparkling lady
passes quickly to
the seclusion of
her carriage.
Presently
under the dirty, wavy heaven
of a borrowed room he will make

re-inhaled tobacco smoke
his clouds and try them
against the sky's limits!

TRACT

I will teach you my townspeople
how to perform a funeral—
for you have it over a troop
of artists—
unless one should scour the world—
you have the ground sense necessary.

See! the hearse leads.
I begin with a design for a hearse.
For Christ's sake not black—
nor white either— and not polished!
Let it be weathered— like a farm
    wagon—
with gilt wheels (this could be
applied fresh at small expense)
or no wheels at all:
a rough day to drag over the ground.

Knock the glass out!
My God—glass, my townspeople!
For what purpose? Is it for the dead
to look out or for us to see
how well he is housed or to see

the flowers or the lack of them—
or what?
To keep the rain and snow from him?
He will have a heavier rain soon:
pebbles and dirt and what not.
Let there be no glass—
and no upholstery phew!
and no little brass rollers
and small easy wheels on the bottom—
my townspeople what are you thinking
of?

A rough plain hearse then
with gilt wheels and no top at all.
On this the coffin lies
by its own weight.

No wreathes please—
especially no hot house flowers.
Some common memento is better,
something he prized and is known by:
his old clothes— a few books perhaps—
God knows what! You realize
how we are about these things
my townspeople—
something will be found— anything
even flowers if he had come to that.

So much for the hearse.
For heaven's sake though see to the
driver!

Take off the silk hat! In fact
that's no place at all for him—
up there unceremoniously
dragging our friend out to his own
dignity!
Bring him down— bring him down!
Low and inconspicuous! I'd not have
him ride
on the wagon at all— damn him—
the undertaker's understrapper!
Let him hold the reins
and walk at the side
and inconspicuously too!

Then briefly as to yourselves:
Walk behind— as they do in France,
seventh class, or if you ride
Hell take curtains! Go with some
show
of inconvenience; sit openly—
to the weather as to grief.
Or do you think you can shut grief in?
What—from us? We who have perhaps
nothing to lose? Share with us
share with us— it will be money
in your pockets.
Go now
I think you are ready.

PROMENADE

I.

Well, mind, here we have
our little son beside us:
a little diversion before breakfast!

Come, we'll walk down the road
till the bacon will be frying.
We might better be idle?
A poem might come of it?
Oh, be useful. Save annoyance
to Flossie and besides—the wind!
It's cold. It blows our
old pants out! It makes us shiver!
See the heavy trees
shifting their weight before it.
Let us be trees, an old house,
a hill with grass on it!
The baby's arms are blue.
Come, move! Be quieted!

II.

So. We'll sit here now
and throw pebbles into
this water-trickle.

Splash the water up!
(Splash it up, Sonny!) Laugh!
Hit it there deep under the grass.

See it splash! Ah, mind,
see it splash! It is alive!
Throw pieces of broken leaves
into it. They'll pass through.
No! Yes—just!

Away now for the cows! But—
It's cold!
It's getting dark.
It's going to rain.
No further!

III.

Oh then, a wreath! Let's
refresh something they
used to write well of.

Two fern plumes. Strip them
to the mid-rib along one side.
Bind the tips with a grass stem.
Bend and intertwist the stalks
at the back. So!
Ah! now we are crowned!
Now we are a poet!

Quickly!
A bunch of little flowers
for Flossie—the little ones
only:
a red clover, one

blue heal-all, a sprig of
bone-set, one primrose,
a head of Indian tobacco, this
magenta speck and this
little lavender!
Home now, my mind!—
Sonny's arms are icy, I tell you—
and have breakfast!

EL HOMBRE

It's a strange courage
you give me ancient star:

Shine alone in the sunrise
toward which you lend no part!

HERO

Fool,
put your adventures
into those things
which break ships—
not female flesh.

Let there pass
over the mind
the waters of

four oceans, the airs
of four skies!

Return hollow-bellied,
keen-eyed, hard!
A simple scar or two.

Little girls will come
bringing you
roses for your button-hole.

LIBERTAD! IGUALDAD! FRATERNIDAD!

You sullen pig of a man
you force me into the mud
with your stinking ash-cart!

Brother!
—if we were rich
we'd stick our chests out
and hold our heads high!

It is dreams that have destroyed us.

There is no more pride
in horses or in rein holding.
We sit hunched together brooding
our fate.

Well—
all things turn bitter in the end
whether you choose the right or
the left way
and—
dreams are not a bad thing.

CANTHARA

The old black-man showed me
how he had been shocked
in his youth
by six women, dancing
a set-dance, stark naked below
the skirts raised round
their breasts:
bellies flung forward
knees flying!
—while
his gestures, against the
tiled wall of the dingy bath-room,
swished with ecstasy to
the familiar music of
his old emotion.

MUJER

Oh, black Persian cat!
Was not your life
already cursed with offspring?

We took you for rest to that old
Yankee farm,—so lonely
and with so many field mice
in the long grass—
and you return to us
in this condition—!

Oh, black Persian cat.

SUMMER SONG

Wanderer moon
smiling a
faintly ironical smile
at this
brilliant, dew-moistened
summer morning,—
a detached
sleepily indifferent
smile, a
wanderer's smile,—
if I should
buy a shirt
your color and
put on a necktie
sky blue
where would they carry me?

LOVE SONG

Sweep the house clean,
hang fresh curtains
in the windows
put on a new dress
and come with me!
The elm is scattering
its little loaves
of sweet smells
from a white sky!

Who shall hear of us
in the time to come?
Let him say there was
a burst of fragrance
from black branches.

FOREIGN

Artsybashev is a Russian.
I am an American.
Let us wonder, my townspeople,
if Artsybashev tends his own fires
as I do, gets himself cursed
for the baby's failure to thrive,
loosens windows for the woman
who cleans his parlor—
or has he neat servants

and a quiet library, an
intellectual wife perhaps and
no children,—an apartment
somewhere in a back street or
lives alone or with his mother
or sister—

I wonder, my townspeople,
if Artsybashev looks upon
himself the more concernedly
or succeeds any better than I
in laying the world.

I wonder which is the bigger
fool in his own mind.

These are shining topics
my townspeople but—
hardly of great moment.

A PRELUDE

I know only the bare rocks of today.
In these lies my brown sea-weed,—
green quartz veins bent through the wet
shale;
in these lie my pools left by the tide—
quiet, forgetting waves;

on these stiffen white star fish;
on these I slip bare footed!

Whispers of the fishy air touch my body;
"Sisters," I say to them.

HISTORY

I.

A wind might blow a lotus petal
over the pyramids—but not this wind.

Summer is a dried leaf.

Leaves stir this way then that
on the baked asphalt, the wheels
of motor cars rush over them,—
    gas smells mingle with leaf smells.

Oh, Sunday, day of worship! ! !

The steps to the museum are high.
Worshippers pass in and out.
Nobody comes here today.
I come here to mingle faiance dug
from the tomb, turquoise colored
necklaces and belched wind from the
stomach; delicately veined basins
of agate, cracked and discolored and
the stink of stale urine!

Enter! Elbow in at the door.
Men? Women?
Simpering, clay fetish-faces counting
through the turnstile.
Ah!

II.

This sarcophagus contained the body
of Uresh-Nai, priestess to the goddess
Mut,
Mother of All—

Run your finger against this edge!
—here went the chisel!—and think
of an arrogance endured six thousand
years
without a flaw!

But love is an oil to embalm the body.
Love is a packet of spices, a strong
smelling liquid to be squirted into
the thigh. No?
Love rubbed on a bald head will make
hair—and after? Love is
a lice comber!
Gnats on dung!

"The chisel is in your hand, the block
is before you, cut as I shall dictate:
this is the coffin of Uresh-Nai,

priestess to the sky goddess,—built
to endure forever!
Carve the inside
with the image of my death in
little lines of figures three fingers high.
Put a lid on it cut with Mut bending over
the earth, for my headpiece, and in the
year
to be chosen I will rouse, the lid
shall be lifted and I will walk about
the temple where they have rested me
and eat the air of the place:

Ah—these walls are high! This
is in keeping."

III.

The priestess has passed into her tomb.
The stone has taken up her spirit!
Granite over flesh: who will deny
its advantages?

Your death?—water
spilled upon the ground—
though water will mount again into rose-
leaves—
but you?—would hold life still,
even as a memory, when it is over.
Benevolence is rare.

Climb about this sarcophagus, read
what is writ for you in these figures,

hard as the granite that has held them
with so soft a hand the while
your own flesh has been fifty times
through the guts of oxen,—read!
"The rose-tree will have its donor
even though he give stingily.
The gift of some endures
ten years, the gift of some twenty
and the gift of some for the time a
great house rots and is torn down.
Some give for a thousand years to men of
one face, some for a thousand
to all men and some few to all men
while granite holds an edge against
the weather.
Judge then of love!"

IV.

"My flesh is turned to stone. I
have endured my summer. The flurry
of falling petals is ended. Lay
the finger upon this granite. I was
well desired and fully caressed
by many lovers but my flesh
withered swiftly and my heart was
never satisfied. Lay your hands
upon the granite as a lover lays his
hand upon the thigh and upon the
round breasts of her who is
beside him, for now I will not wither,

now I have thrown off secrecy, now
I have walked naked into the street,
now I have scattered my heavy beauty
in the open market.
Here I am with head high and a
burning heart eagerly awaiting
your caresses, whoever it may be,
for granite is not harder than
my love is open, runs loose among you!

I arrogant against death! I
who have endured! I worn against
the years!"

V.

But it is five o'clock. Come!
Life is good—enjoy it!
A walk in the park while the day lasts.
I will go with you. Look! this
northern scenery is not the Nile, but—
these benches—the yellow and purple
dusk—
the moon there—these tired people—
the lights on the water!

Are not these Jews and—Ethiopians?
The world is young, surely! Young
and colored like—a girl that has come
upon
a lover! Will that do?

WINTER QUIET

Limb to limb, mouth to mouth
with the bleached grass
silver mist lies upon the back yards
among the outhouses.
The dwarf trees
pirouette awkwardly to it—
whirling round on one toe;
the big tree smiles and glances
upward!
Tense with suppressed excitement
the fences watch where the ground
has humped an aching shoulder for
the ecstasy.

DAWN

Ecstatic bird songs pound
the hollow vastness of the sky
with metallic clinkings—
beating color up into it
at a far edge,—beating it, beating it
with rising, triumphant ardor,—
stirring it into warmth,
quickening in it a spreading change,—
bursting wildly against it as
dividing the horizon, a heavy sun
lifts himself—is lifted—

bit by bit above the edge
of things,—runs free at last
out into the open—! lumbering
glorified in full release upward—
songs cease.

GOOD NIGHT

In brilliant gas light
I turn the kitchen spigot
and watch the water plash
into the clean white sink.
On the grooved drain-board
to one side is
a glass filled with parsley—
crisped green.
Waiting
for the water to freshen—
I glance at the spotless floor—:
a pair of rubber sandals
lie side by side
under the wall-table,
all is in order for the night.

Waiting, with a glass in my hand
—three girls in crimson satin
pass close before me'on
the murmurous background of
the crowded opera—
it is

memory playing the clown—
three vague, meaningless girls
full of smells and
the rustling sound of
cloth rubbing on cloth and
little slippers on carpet—
high-school French
spoken in a loud voice!

Parsley in a glass,
still and shining,
brings me back. I take my drink
and yawn deliciously.
I am ready for bed.

DANSE RUSSE

If I when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,—
if I in my north room
danse naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
"I am lonely, lonely.

I was born to be lonely.
I am best so!"
If I admire my arms, my face
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,—

who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN IN BED

There's my things
drying in the corner:
that blue skirt
joined to the grey shirt—

I'm sick of trouble!
Lift the covers
if you want me
and you'll see
the rest of my clothes—
though it would be cold
lying with nothing on!

I won't work
and I've got no cash.
What are you going to do
about it?

—and no jewelry
(the crazy fools)

But I've my two eyes
and a smooth face
and here's this! look!
it's high!
There's brains and blood
in there—
my name's Robitza!
Corsets
can go to the devil—
and drawers along with them!
What do I care!

My two boys?
—they're keen!
Let the rich lady
care for them—
they'll beat the school
or
let them go to the gutter—
that ends trouble.

This house is empty
isn't it?
Then it's mine
because I need it.

Oh, I won't starve
while there's the Bible
to make them feed me.

Try to help me
if you want trouble
or leave me alone—
that ends trouble.

The county physician
is a damned fool
and you
can go to hell!

You could have closed the door
when you came in;
do it when you go out.
I'm tired.

VIRTUE

Now? Why—
whirl-pools of
orange and purple flame
feather twists of chrome
on a green ground
funneling down upon
the steaming phallus-head
of the mad sun himself—
blackened crimson!
Now?

Why—
it is the smile of her
the smell of her
the vulgar inviting mouth of her!
It is—Oh, nothing new
nothing that lasts
an eternity, nothing worth
putting out to interest,
nothing—
but the fixing of an eye
concretely upon emptiness!

Come! here are—
cross-eyed men, a boy
with a patch, men walking
in their shirts, men in hats
dark men, a pale man
with little black moustaches
and a dirty white coat,
fat men with pudgy faces,
thin faces, crooked faces
slit eyes, grey eyes, black eyes
old men with dirty beards,
men in vests with
gold watch chains. Come!

CONQUEST

[*Dedicated to F. W.*]

Hard, chilly colors:
straw grey, frost grey
the grey of frozen ground:
and you, O sun,
close above the horizon!
It is I holds you—
half against the sky
half against a black tree trunk
icily resplendent!

Lie there, blue city, mine at last—
rimming the banked blue grey
and rise, indescribable smoky yellow
into the overpowering white!

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN WITH A BAD HEART

Have I seen her?
Only through the window
across the street.

If I go meeting her
on the corner
some damned fool
will go blabbing it

to the old man and
she'll get hell.
He's a queer old bastard!
Every time he sees me
you'd think
I wanted to kill him.
But I figure it out
it's best to let things
stay as they are—
for a while at least.

It's hard
giving up the thing
you want most
in the world, but with this
damned pump of mine
liable to give out...

She's a good kid
and I'd hate to hurt her
but if she can get over it—

it'd be the best thing.

KELLER GEGEN DOM

Witness, would you—
one more young man
in the evening of his love
hurrying to confession:

steps down a gutter
crosses a street
goes in at a doorway
opens for you—
like some great flower—
a room filled with lamplight;
or whirls himself
obediently to
the curl of a hill
some wind-dancing afternoon;
lies for you in
the futile darkness of
a wall, sets stars dancing
to the crack of a leaf—

and—leaning his head away—
snuffs (secretly)
the bitter powder from
his thumb's hollow,
takes your blessing and
goes home to bed?

Witness instead
whether you like it or not
a dark vinegar smelling place
from which trickles
the chuckle of
beginning laughter

It strikes midnight.

SMELL!

Oh strong ridged and deeply hollowed
nose of mine! what will you not be
smelling?
What tactless asses we are, you and I,
boney nose,
always indiscriminate, always unashamed,
and now it is the souring flowers of the
bedraggled
poplars: a festering pulp on the wet earth
beneath them. With what deep thirst
we quicken our desires
to that rank odor of a passing spring-
time!
Can you not be decent? Can you not
reserve your ardors
for something less unlovely? What girl
will care
for us, do you think, if we continue in
these ways?
Must you taste everything? Must you
know everything?
Must you have a part in everything?

BALLET

Are you not weary,
great gold cross
shining in the wind—
are you not weary

of seeing the stars
turning over you
and the sun
going to his rest
and you frozen with
a great lie
that leaves you
rigid as a knight
on a marble coffin?

—and you,
higher, still,
robin,
untwisting a song
from the bare
top-twigs,
are you not
weary of labor,
even the labor of
a song?

Come down—join me
for I am lonely.

First it will be
a quiet pace
to ease our stiffness
but as the west yellows
you will be ready!

Here in the middle
of the roadway
we will fling
ourselves round
with dust lilies
till we are bound in
their twining stems!
We will tear
their flowers
with arms flashing!

And when
the astonished stars
push aside
their curtains
they will see us
fall exhausted where
wheels and
the pounding feet
of horses
will crush forth
our laughter.

SYMPATHETIC PORTRAIT OF A CHILD

The murderer's little daughter
who is barely ten years old
jerks her shoulders
right and left

so as to catch a glimpse of me
without turning round.

Her skinny little arms
wrap themselves
this way then that
reversely about her body!
Nervously
she crushes her straw hat
about her eyes
and tilts her head
to deepen the shadow—
smiling excitedly!

As best as she can
she hides herself
in the full sunlight
her cordy legs writhing
beneath the little flowered dress
that leaves them bare
from mid-thigh to ankle—

Why has she chosen me
for the knife
that darts along her smile?

THE OGRE

Sweet child,
little girl with well shaped legs
you cannot touch the thoughts
I put over and under and around you.

This is fortunate for they would
burn you to an ash otherwise.
Your petals would be quite curled up.

This is all beyond you—no doubt,
yet you do feel the brushings
of the fine needles;
the tentative lines of your whole body
prove it to me;
so does your fear of me,
your shyness;
likewise the toy baby cart
that you are pushing—
and besides, mother has begun
to dress your hair in a knot.
These are my excuses.

RIPOSTE

Love is like water or the air
my townspeople;
it cleanses, and dissipates evil gases.
It is like poetry too
and for the same reasons.

Love is so precious
my townspeople
that if I were you I would
have it under lock and key—
like the air or the Atlantic or
like poetry!

THE OLD MEN

Old men who have studied
every leg show
in the city
Old men cut from touch
by the perfumed music—
polished or fleeced skulls
that stand before
the whole theater
in silent attitudes
of attention,—
old men who have taken precedence
over young men
and even over dark-faced
husbands whose minds
are a street with arc-lights.
Solitary old men for whom
we find no excuses—
I bow my head in shame
for those who malign you.
Old men
the peaceful beer of impotence
be yours!

PASTORAL

If I say I have heard voices
who will believe me?

"None has dipped his hand

in the black waters of the sky
nor picked the yellow lilies
that sway on their clear stems
and no tree has waited
long enough nor still enough
to touch fingers with the moon."

I looked and there were little frogs
with puffed out throats,
singing in the slime.

SPRING STRAINS

In a tissue-thin monotone of blue-grey
buds
crowded erect with desire against
the sky—
tense blue-grey twigs
slenderly anchoring them down, drawing
them in—
two blue-grey birds chasing
a third struggle in circles, angles,
swift convergings to a point that bursts
instantly!
Vibrant bowing limbs
pull downward, sucking in the sky
that bulges from behind, plastering itself
against them in packed rifts, rock blue
and dirty orange!
But—

(Hold hard, rigid jointed trees!)
the blinding and red-edged sun-blur—
creeping energy, concentrated
counterforce—welds sky, buds, trees,
rivets them in one puckering hold!
Sticks through! Pulls the whole
counter-pulling mass upward, to the
right,
locks even the opaque, not yet defined
ground in a terrific drag that is
loosening the very tap-roots!

On a tissue-thin monotone of blue-grey
buds
two blue-grey birds, chasing a third,
at full cry! Now they are
flung outward and up—disappearing
suddenly!

TREES

Crooked, black tree
on your little grey-black hillock,
ridiculously raised one step toward
the infinite summits of the night:
even you the few grey stars
draw upward into a vague melody
of harsh threads.

Bent as you are from straining
against the bitter horizontals of

a north wind,—there below you
how easily the long yellow notes
of poplars flow upward in a descending
scale, each note secure in its own
posture—singularly woven.

All voices are blent willingly
against the heaving contra-bass
of the dark but you alone
warp yourself passionately to one side
in your eagerness.

A PORTRAIT IN GREYS

Will it never be possible
to separate you from your greyness?
Must you be always sinking backward
into your grey-brown landscapes—and
trees
always in the distance, always against
a grey sky?
Must I be always
moving counter to you? Is there no
place
where we can be at peace together
and the motion of our drawing apart
be altogether taken up?
I see myself
standing upon your shoulders touching

a grey, broken sky—
but you, weighted down with me,
yet gripping my ankles,—move
laboriously on,
where it is level and undisturbed by
colors.

INVITATION

You who had the sense
to choose me such a mother,
you who had the indifference
to create me,
you who went to some pains
to leave hands off me
in the formative stages,—
(I thank you most for that
perhaps)
but you who
with an iron head, first,
fiercest and with strongest love
brutalized me into strength,
old dew-lap,—
I have reached the stage
where I am teaching myself
to laugh.
Come on,
take a walk with me.

DIVERTIMIENTO

Miserable little woman
in a brown coat—
quit whining!
My hand for you!
We'll skip down the tin cornices
of Main Street
flicking the dull roof-line
with our toe-tips!
Hop clear of the bank! A
pin-wheel round the white flag-pole.

And I'll sing you the while
a thing to split your sides
about Johann Sebastian Bach,
the father of music, who had
three wives and twenty-two children.

JANUARY MORNING

SUITE

I.

I have discovered that most of
the beauties of travel are due to
the strange hours we keep to see them:

the domes of the Church of
the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken

against a smoky dawn—the heart
    stirred—
are beautiful as Saint Peters
approached after years of anticipation.

II.

Though the operation was postponed
I saw the tall probationers
in their tan uniforms
                hurrying to breakfast!

III.

—and from basement entrys
neatly coiffed, middle aged gentlemen
with orderly moustaches and
well brushed coats

IV.

—and the sun, dipping into the avenues
streaking the tops of
the irregular red houselets,
                and
the gay shadows dropping and dropping.

V.

—and a young horse with a green bed-
    quilt
on his withers shaking his head:
bared teeth and nozzle high in the air!

VI.

—and a semicircle of dirt colored men
about a fire bursting from an old
ash can,

VII.

—and the worn,
blue car rails (like the sky!)
gleaming among the cobbles!

VIII.

—and the rickety ferry-boat "Arden"!
What an object to be called "'Arden"
among the great piers,—on the
ever new river!
"Put me a Touchstone
at the wheel, white gulls, and we'll
follow the ghost of the Half Moon
to the North West Passage—and
through!
(at Albany!) for all that!"

IX.

Exquisite brown waves—long
circlets of silver moving over you!
enough with crumbling ice-crusts among
you!
The sky has come down to you,
lighter than tiny bubbles, face to

face with you!
His spirit is
a white gull with delicate pink feet
and a snowy breast for you to
hold to your lips delicately!

X.

The young doctor is dancing with
happiness
in the sparkling wind, alone
at the prow of the ferry! He notices
the curdy barnacles and broken ice crusts
left at the slip's base by the low tide
and thinks of summer and green
shell crusted ledges among
the emerald eel-grass!

XI.

Who knows the Palisades as I do
knows the river breaks east from them
above the city—but they continue south
—under the sky—to bear a crest of
little peering houses that brighten
with dawn behind the moody
water-loving giants of Manhattan.

XII.

Long yellow rushes bending
above the white snow patches;
purple and gold ribbon

of the distant wood:
                what an angle
you make with each other as
you lie there in contemplation.

XIII.

Work hard all your young days
and they'll find you too, some morning
staring up under
your chiffonier at its warped
bass-wood bottom and your soul—
out!
—among the little sparrows
behind the shutter.

XIV.

—and the flapping flags are at
half mast for the dead admiral.

XV.

All this—
        was for you, old woman.
I wanted to write a poem
that you would understand.
For what good is it to me
if you can't understand it?
                But you got to try hard—
But—
        Well, you know how
the young girls run giggling

on Park Avenue after dark
when they ought to be home in bed?
Well,
that's the way it is with me somehow.

TO A SOLITARY DISCIPLE

Rather notice, mon cher,
that the moon is
tilted above
the point of the steeple
than that its color
is shell-pink.

Rather observe
that it is early morning
than that the sky
is smooth
as a turquoise.

Rather grasp
how the dark
converging lines
of the steeple
meet at the pinnacle—
perceive how
its little ornament
tries to stop them—

See how it fails!
See how the converging lines
of the hexagonal spire
escape upward—
receding, dividing!
—sepals
that guard and contain
the flower!

Observe
how motionless
the eaten moon
lies in the protecting lines.

It is true:
in the light colors
of morning
brown-stone and slate
shine orange and dark blue.

But observe
the oppressive weight
of the squat edifice!
Observe
the jasmine lightness
of the moon.

DEDICATION FOR A PLOT OF GROUND

This plot of ground
facing the waters of this inlet
is dedicated to the living presence of
Emily Richardson Wellcome
who was born in England; married;
lost her husband and with
her five year old son
sailed for New York in a two-master;
was driven to the Azores;
ran adrift on Fire Island shoal,
met her second husband
in a Brooklyn boarding house,
went with him to Puerto Rico
bore three more children, lost
her second husband, lived hard
for eight years in St. Thomas,
Puerto Rico, San Domingo, followed
the oldest son to New York,
lost her daughter, lost her "baby,"
seized the two boys of
the oldest son by the second marriage
mothered them—they being
motherless—fought for them
against the other grandmother
and the aunts, brought them here
summer after summer, defended
herself here against thieves,

storms, sun, fire,
against flies, against girls
that came smelling about, against
drought, against weeds, storm-tides,
neighbors, weasles that stole her chickens,
against the weakness of her own hands,
against the growing strength of
the boys, against wind, against
the stones, against trespassers,
against rents, against her own mind.

She grubbed this earth with her own
hands,
domineered over this grass plot,
blackguarded her oldest son
into buying it, lived here fifteen years,
attained a final loneliness and—

If you can bring nothing to this place
but your carcass, keep out.

K. McB.

You exquisite chunk of mud
Kathleen—just like
any other chunk of mud!
—especially in April!
Curl up round their shoes
when they try to step on you,
spoil the polish!

I shall laugh till I am sick
at their amazement.
Do they expect the ground to be
always solid?
Give them the slip then;
let them sit in you;
soil their pants;
teach them a dignity
that is dignity, the dignity
of mud!

Lie basking in
the sun then—fast asleep!
Even become dust on occasion.

LOVE SONG

I lie here thinking of you:—

the stain of love
is upon the world!
Yellow, yellow, yellow
it eats into the leaves,
smears with saffron
the horned branches that lean
heavily
against a smooth purple sky!
There is no light

only a honey-thick stain
that drips from leaf to leaf
and limb to limb
spoiling the colors
of the whole world—

you far off there under
the wine-red selvage of the west!

THE WANDERER

THE WANDERER

A Rococo Study

ADVENT

Even in the time when as yet
I had no certain knowledge of her
She sprang from the nest, a young crow,
Whose first flight circled the forest.
I know now how then she showed me
Her mind, reaching out to the horizon,
She close above the tree tops.
I saw her eyes straining at the new distance
And as the woods fell from her flying
Likewise they fell from me as I followed—
So that I strongly guessed all that I must put
from me
To come through ready for the high courses.

But one day, crossing the ferry
With the great towers of Manhattan before me,
Out at the prow with the sea wind blowing,
I had been wearying many questions
Which she had put on to try me:
How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?
When lo! in a rush, dragging
A blunt boat on the yielding river—
Suddenly I saw her! And she waved me
From the white wet in midst of her playing!
She cried me, "Haia! Here I am, son!

See how strong my little finger is!
Can I not swim well?
I can fly too!" And with that a great sea-gull
Went to the left, vanishing with a wild cry—
But in my mind all the persons of godhead
Followed after.

CLARITY

"Come!" cried my mind and by her might
That was upon us we flew above the river
Seeking her, grey gulls among the white—
In the air speaking as she had willed it:
"I am given," cried I, "now I know it!
I know now all my time is forespent!
For me one face is all the world!
For I have seen her at last, this day,
In whom age in age is united—
Indifferent, out of sequence, marvelously!
Saving alone that one sequence
Which is the beauty of all the world, for surely
Either there in the rolling smoke spheres below us
Or here with us in the air intercircling,
Certainly somewhere here about us
I know she is revealing these things!"

And as gulls we flew and with soft cries
We seemed to speak, flying, "It is she
The mighty, recreating the whole world,
This the first day of wonders!

She is attiring herself before me—
Taking shape before me for worship,
A red leaf that falls upon a stone!
It is she of whom I told you, old
Forgiveless, unreconcilable;
That high wanderer of by-ways
Walking imperious in beggary!
At her throat is loose gold, a single chain
From among many, on her bent fingers
Are rings from which the stones are fallen,
Her wrists wear a diminished state, her ankles
Are bare! Toward the river! Is it she there?"
And we swerved clamorously downward—
"I will take my peace in her henceforth!"

BROADWAY

It was then she struck—from behind,
In mid air, as with the edge of a great wing!
And instantly down the mists of my eyes
There came crowds walking—men as visions
With expressionless, animate faces;
Empty men with shell-thin bodies
Jostling close above the gutter,
Hasting—nowhere! And then for the first time
I really saw her, really scented the sweat
Of her presence and—fell back sickened!
Ominous, old, painted—
With bright lips, and lewd Jew's eyes
Her might strapped in by a corset
To give her age youth, perfect

In her will to be young she had covered
The godhead to go beside me.
Silent, her voice entered at my eyes
And my astonished thought followed her easily:
"Well, do their eyes shine, do their clothes fit?
These *live* I tell you! Old men with red cheeks,
Young men in gay suits! See them!
Dogged, quivering, impassive—
Well—are these the ones you envied?"
At which I answered her, "Marvelous old queen,
Grant me power to catch something of this day's
Air and sun into your service!
That these toilers after peace and after pleasure
May turn to you, worshippers at all hours!"
But she sniffed upon the words warily—
Yet I persisted, watching for an answer:
"To you, horrible old woman,
Who know all fires out of the bodies
Of all men that walk with lust at heart!
To you, O mighty, crafty prowler
After the youth of all cities, drunk
With the sight of thy archness! All the youth
That come to you, you having the knowledge
Rather than to those uninitiate—
To you, marvelous old queen, give me always
A new marriage—"
But she laughed loudly—
"A new grip upon those garments that brushed me
In days gone by on beach, lawn, and in forest!
May I be lifted still, up and out of terror,

Up from before the death living around me—
Torn up continually and carried
Whatever way the head of your whim is,
A burr upon those streaming tatters—"
But the night had fallen, she stilled me
And led me away.

PATERSON—THE STRIKE

At the first peep of dawn she roused me!
I rose trembling at the change which the night
saw!
For there, wretchedly brooding in a corner
From which he old eyes glittered fiercely—
"Go!" she said, and I hurried shivering
Out into the deserted streets of Paterson.

That night she came again, hovering
In rags within the filmy ceiling—
"Great Queen, bless me with thy tatters!"
"You are blest, go on!"
"Hot for savagery,
Sucking the air! I went into the city,
Out again, baffled onto the mountain!
Back into the city!
Nowhere
The subtle! Everywhere the electric!"

"A short bread-line before a hitherto empty tea
shop:

893687A

No questions—all stood patiently,
Dominated by one idea: something
That carried them as they are always wanting
to be carried,
'But what is it,' I asked those nearest me,
'This thing heretofore unobtainable
That they seem so clever to have put on now!'

"Why since I have failed them can it be anything but their own brood?
Can it be anything but brutality?
On that at least they're united! That at least
Is their bean soup, their calm bread and a few luxuries!

"But in me, more sensitive, marvelous old queen
It sank deep into the blood, that I rose upon
The tense air enjoying the dusty fight!
Heavy drink were the low, sloping foreheads
The flat skulls with the unkempt black or blond hair,
The ugly legs of the young girls, pistons
Too powerful for delicacy!
The women's wrists, the men's arms, red
Used to heat and cold, to toss quartered beeves
And barrels, and milk-cans, and crates of fruit!

"Faces all knotted up like burls on oaks,
Grasping, fox-snouted, thick-lipped,
Sagging breasts and protruding stomachs,
Rasping voices, filthy habits with the hands.

"Nowhere you! Everywhere the electric!

"Ugly, venemous, gigantic!
Tossing me as a great father his helpless
Infant till it shriek with ecstasy
And its eyes roll and its tongue hangs out!—

"I am at peace again, old queen, I listen clearer
now."

ABROAD

Never, even in a dream,
Have I winged so high nor so well
As with her, she leading me by the hand,
That first day on the Jersey mountains!
And never shall I forget
The trembling interest with which I heard
Her voice in a low thunder:
"You are safe here. Look child, look open-
mouth!
The patch of road between the steep bramble
banks;
The tree in the wind, the white house there, the
sky!
Speak to men of these, concerning me!
For never while you permit them to ignore me
In these shall the full of my freed voice
Come grappling the ear with intent!
Never while the air's clear coolness

Is seized to be a coat for pettiness;
Never while richness of greenery
Stands a shield for prurient minds;
Never, permitting these things unchallenged
Shall my voice of leaves and varicolored bark
come free through!"
At which, knowing her solitude,
I shouted over the country below me:
"Waken! my people, to the boughs green
With ripening fruit within you!
Waken to the myriad cinquefoil
In the waving grass of your minds!
Waken to the silent phoebe nest
Under the eaves of your spirit!"

But she, stooping nearer the shifting hills
Spoke again. "Look there! See them!
There in the oat field with the horses,
See them there! bowed by their passions
Crushed down, that had been raised as a roof
beam!
The weight of the sky is upon them
Under which all roof beams crumble.
There is none but the single roof beam:
There is no love bears against the great firefly!
At this I looked up at the sun
Then shouted again with all the might I had.
But my voice was a seed in the wind.
Then she, the old one, laughing
Seized me and whirling about bore back

To the city, upward, still laughing
Until the great towers stood above the marshland
Wheeling beneath: the little creeks, the mallows
That I picked as a boy, the Hackensack
So quiet that seemed so broad formerly:
The crawling trains, the cedar swamp on the one side—
All so old, so familiar—so new now
To my marvelling eyes as we passed
Invisible.

SOOTHSAY

Eight days went by, eight days
Comforted by no nights, until finally:
"Would you behold yourself old, beloved?"
I was pierced, yet I consented gladly
For I knew it could not be otherwise.
And she—"Behold yourself old!
Sustained in strength, wielding might in gript surges!
Not bodying the sun in weak leaps
But holding way over rockish men
With fern free fingers on their little crags,
Their hollows, the new Atlas, to bear them
For pride and for mockery! Behold
Yourself old! winding with slow might—
A vine among oaks—to the thin tops:
Leaving the leafless leaved,
Bearing purple clusters! Behold

Yourself old! birds are behind you.
You are the wind coming that stills birds,
Shakes the leaves in booming polyphony—
Slow, winning high way amid the knocking
Of boughs, evenly crescendo,
The din and bellow of the male wind!
Leap then from forest into foam!
Lash about from low into high flames
Tipping sound, the female chorus—
Linking all lions, all twitterings
To make them nothing! Behold yourself old!"
As I made to answer she continued,
A little wistfully yet in a voice clear cut:
"Good is my over lip and evil
My underlip to you henceforth:
For I have taken your soul between my two hands
And this shall be as it is spoken."

ST. JAMES' GROVE

And so it came to that last day
When, she leading by the hand, we went out
Early in the morning, I heavy of heart
For I knew the novitiate was ended
The ecstasy was over, the life begun.

In my woolen shirt and the pale blue necktie
My grandmother gave me, there I went
With the old queen right past the houses

Of my friends down the hill to the river
As on any usual day, any errand.
Alone, walking under trees,
I went with her, she with me in her wild hair,
By Santiago Grove and presently
She bent forward and knelt by the river,
The Passaic, that filthy river.
And there dabbling her mad hands,
She called me close beside her.
Raising the water then in the cupped palm
She bathed our brows wailing and laughing:
"River, we are old, you and I,
We are old and by bad luck, beggars.
Lo, the filth in our hair, our bodies stink!
Old friend, here I have brought you
The young soul you long asked of me.
Stand forth, river, and give me
The old friend of my revels!
Give me the well-worn spirit,
For here I have made a room for it,
And I will return to you forthwith
The youth you have long asked of me:
Stand forth, river, and give me
The old friend of my revels!"

And the filthy Passaic consented!

Then she, leaping up with a fierce cry:
"Enter, youth, into this bulk!
Enter, river, into this young man!"

Then the river began to enter my heart,
Eddying back cool and limpid
Into the crystal beginning of its days.
But with the rebound it leaped forward:
Muddy, then black and shrunken
Till I felt the utter depth of its rottenness
The vile breadth of its degradation
And dropped down knowing this was me now.
But she lifted me and the water took a new tide
Again into the older experiences,
And so, backward and forward,
It tortured itself within me
Until time had been washed finally under,
And the river had found its level
And its last motion had ceased
And I knew all—it became me.
And I knew this for double certain
For there, whitely, I saw myself
Being borne off under the water!
I could have shouted out in my agony
At the sight of myself departing
Forever—but I bit back my despair
For she had averted her eyes
By which I knew well what she was thinking—
And so the last of me was taken.

Then she, "Be mostly silent!"
And turning to the river, spoke again:
"For him and for me, river, the wandering,
But by you I leave for happiness

Deep foliage, the thickest beeches—
Though elsewhere they are all dying—
Tallest oaks and yellow birches
That dip their leaves in you, mourning,
As now I dip my hair, immemorial
Of me, immemorial of him
Immemorial of these our promises!
Here shall be a bird's paradise,
They sing to you remembering my voice:
Here the most secluded spaces
For miles around, hallowed by a stench
To be our joint solitude and temple;
In memory of this clear marriage
And the child I have brought you in the late
years.
Live, river, live in luxuriance
Remembering this our son,
In remembrance of me and my sorrow
And of the new wandering!"

[illegible]

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